

OCEAN ROUTE TO AUSTRALASIA THROUGH ATLANTIC AND PACIFIC.

WHATEVER view is held as to the policy of holding the Mediterranean and Canal route in war with a great Naval Power, there can be no doubt whatever that the difficulty of protecting commerce between Port Said and Gibraltar will be great, especially during the early period of hostilities.

it seems probable, however, that this period will, to a great extent, influence future action.

Trade diverted for a time will not quickly return to its original course. Insurance rates once raised to a high figure will not rapidly fall. Confidence shaken at the outset by the evident menace of attack at short distances from numerous Naval Ports, in narrow waters, will not be immediately restored unless a great naval victory were obtained. Such a victory at the outset of war is not probable. In the present uncertainty, an enemy would be unlikely to risk a battle, unless in overpowering superiority.

On all grounds, therefore, continuous maintenance of a trade route through the Mediterranean at the outset of war cannot be counted upon. It follows, therefore, that the transport of Troops and Stores to the East will be equally hazardous, at least for a time.

Of all routes, those of the Atlantic and Pacific will be safest in war with a Naval Power.

Fast ships on these routes cannot well be captured, except by mere mischance, on the Ocean.

No probable enemy, no nation, except the United States, is likely in the immediate future to develop any considerable naval strength in the Pacific, while the maintenance of strong squadrons in the western verge of the Atlantic will be difficult to any power not in alliance with the United States.

Again, these Ocean routes pass near no naval bases of European Powers, which, especially at the outset of war, will confer on them practical immunity from raids. On the Cape route there is the menace of Dalkar, of Reunion, and possibly of Diego Suarez, which cannot be ignored, and which would unquestionably raise insurance rates to a high figure.

On all grounds, therefore, a secure route to the East at the outset of war would confer inestimable advantages upon the Empire. It may be argued that the route can always be adopted if the need arises, and that no special preparation in peace time is required. This is only partially true. Shipping can now adapt itself to almost any new course which circumstances may require, but, for the rapid transport of men and stores, special arrangements are entailed which cannot be rapidly extemporised. An accustomed trade route, regularly used in peace time, will invariably offer inestimable advantages as a communication in war. Along it troops and stores could at once be smoothly conveyed without delays or confusion.

I therefore consider that, from the purely military point of view, any steps taken to develop the Ocean route would add greatly to the potential strength of the Empire in war.

This route once fully established would soon become self-supporting in peace time, and would lead to the certain growth of a large shipping in the Pacific, where it is now extremely limited.

The enormous gain in the event of a great war is evident.

At such a time the first necessity will be communication between the scattered members of the Empire. Thus only can its vast resources be brought into play. Thus only can its existence be assured.

I have preferred to dwell on the Military advantages of developing the Western route, and thus providing an alternative line of communication, rather than on the political and economical advantages. The latter must, however, be important and far-reaching.

Politically, the effect will be to bring the members of the Empire into closer union. Economically, the opening up of new avenues of trade will indubitably bring about a wider distribution of products and reduce the stagnation which is now heavily felt by all classes.

On all these grounds I strongly support the policy urged.

It is, for the Imperial Government, a primary duty to aid a project by which National advantages in peace time and security, as well as striking power in war, will be unquestionably attained.

AND. CLARKE

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